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Chapter Author(s): Tracie D. Lukasiewicz

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The Parallelism of the Fantastic and the Real

Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth/El Laberinto del fauno* and Neomagical Realism

Tracie D. Lukasiewicz

Fairy tales have undergone multiple changes and evolved over the centuries as a result of the prejudices and preferences of authors, folklorists, and film directors, producers, and screenwriters. For example, Cinderella's tale (ATU 510A), replicated in Disney's *Cinderella* (directed by Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, and Hamilton Luske, 1950) and *Ever After* (directed by Andy Tennant, 1998), also provided the inspiration for works like *Pretty Woman* (directed by Garry Marshall, 1990) and *Maid in Manhattan* (directed by Wayne Wang, 2002). All share elements commonly associated with fairy tales, such as the phrase "once upon a time," angelic princesses (with or without royal blood), evil stepmothers (or nasty employers), fairy godmothers (or even a helpful male concierge in *Pretty Woman*), and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. These basics lead to the essentially redundant happily-ever-after that the primary characters achieve, allowing hearers, readers, and viewers to feel a certain confidence in the outcome.[1]

Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth/El Laberinto del fauno* (2006), however, presents a much more ominous take on the fairy tale. But despite its lack of the bright colors, comedic characters, and extravagant happiness that mark most well-known fairy tale films—at least those for children—it remains linked to the genre through its use of elements, archetypes, and

1 Ming-Hsun Lin, Linda Pershing and Lisa Gablehouse, and Christy Williams discuss and deconstruct these patterns in this volume.

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motifs in the original tales. That is—like many of the less familiar stories collected by the Grimm brothers, which contain "graphic descriptions of murder, mutilation, cannibalism, infanticide and incest" (Tatar 2004, 3)—*Pan's Labyrinth* includes violence and betrayal.[2] It juxtaposes a bitter and dark reality with the fantastical world—indeed, one with its own torments—experienced by a little girl.[3]

Writer/director del Toro states that "the one thing that alchemy understands and fairy tale lore understands is that you need the vile matter for magic to flourish. You need lead to turn it into gold. You need the two things for the process. So, when people sanitize fairy tales and homogenize them, they become completely uninteresting for me" (quoted in Roberts 2006). In making *Pan's Labyrinth*, del Toro drew upon events he witnessed while growing up in Mexico, as well as on his own imagination, to create a story that is in itself a labyrinth; "a maze is a place where you get lost, but a labyrinth is essentially a place of transit: an ethical, moral transit to one inevitable center" (del Toro, quoted in Arroyo 2006). Thus, his film fluidly intertwines characters and events to bring them to its concluding cohesion—fundamentally its centralized meeting point. Like its labyrinth, del Toro's film leads the viewer to its moral center with the ultimate death of the corrupt and evil villain. The physical maze on screen interlaces with stories in the film but also with the combination of realism, Grimm brutality, and fairy tale expectations that the narrative weaves together.

Pan's Labyrinth presents a realistic and violent story and parallels it to an equally dark and vicious fairy tale. The two run alongside one another but do not cross paths. The characters and places of each world exist separately, connected only through the character of Ofelia (Ivana Baquero). Del Toro's work draws simultaneously upon magical realism and fairy tales, providing an exemplar for neomagical realism—a hybrid genre, as discussed in Cristina Bacchilega and John Rieder's chapter. In this chapter, I examine, explore, and define the way that magical realism and fairy tales help explain Ofelia's fantasy and real worlds. I thus develop the concept of neomagical realism to

2 Cristina Bacchilega and John Rieder, Pauline Greenhill and Anne Brydon, Sidney Eve Matrix, Brian Ray, Naarah Sawers, and Kim Snowden discuss more exceptions to the generalization of the sweet, innocent fairy tale in this collection.

3 As discussed later in greater detail, I use *fantastic* to refer to anything supernatural that occurs for which the reader/viewer (and/or the protagonist) has no commonsensical explanation. Fundamentally similar terms include *magical, extraordinary,* and *wonderful.*

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distinguish *Pan's Labyrinth* from the conventional fairy tale's acceptance of magic within its fantasy world, and magical realism's incorporation of magic into the real world.

The Fantastic, the Marvelous, and the Uncanny

Fantasy is derived from the Latin word "*phantasticus,* which means that which is made visible, visionary, unreal. In this general sense, all imaginary activity is fantastic, all literary works are fantasies" (Jackson 1981, 13). However, despite bending the rules and requirements of the real, the world of fantasy has "an obligation to coherence and to the establishment of a relationship with the reader's experience" (Mathews 1997, 3–4). No matter how outlandish a fantasy plot may be, it nonetheless remains tied to the real world. Fantasy "re-combines and inverts the real, but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real. The fantastic cannot exist independently of that 'real' world which it seems to find so frustratingly finite" (Jackson 1981, 20). The fantastic references "what *could not have happened*; i.e. what *cannot* happen, what *cannot* exist….Fantasy violates the real, contravenes it, denies it, and insists on this denial throughout" (Russ 1973, 52).

For some the fantastic is simply one literary form among many (including horror, fairy tale, and science fiction) within the genre of fantasy "which have similar structural characteristics and which seem to be generated by similar unconscious desires. Through their particular manifestations of desire, they can be associated together" (Jackson 1981, 8). Rosemary Jackson calls fantasy "an enormous and seductive subject. Its association with imagination and with desire has made it an area difficult to articulate or to define, and indeed the 'value' of fantasy has seemed to reside in precisely this resistance to definition, in its 'free-floating' and escapist qualities" (Ibid., 1). For Jackson fantasy is a

> literary mode from which a number of related genres emerge. . . . As a critical term, "fantasy" has been applied rather indiscriminately to any literature which does not give priority to realistic representation: myths, legends, folk and fairy tales . . . all presenting realms "other" than the human. A characteristic most frequently associated with literary fantasy has been its obdurate refusal of prevailing definitions of the "real" or "possible," a refusal amounting at times to violent opposition. (Ibid., 7–14)

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However, Tzvetan Todorov specifies and then distinguishes within the concept. To this literary theorist and philosopher, fantastic literature offers "a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, [where] there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world," producing the "hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (1973, 25). Once the story has explained what the supernatural event is, why it has occurred, and its meaning within the person's life, the fantastic then becomes either the "marvelous" or the "uncanny." If the story attributes a rational explanation (such as drug-induced illusions or bad dreams) for the "apparently supernatural event," it instantiates the uncanny. But if the narrative instead accepts the supernatural event as real and magical, it is marvelous (such as in fairy tales). If the narrative does not specify how the actions took place (as in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, which offers no rationale for its supernatural incidents), the story remains simply classified within the fantastic (Ibid., 41–43). Clearly immersed in the fantastic by any definition, *Pan's Labyrinth* often declines to specify whether its supernatural occurrences are actually happening or are simply a product of a little girl's active imagination. Even the film's resolution fails to clarify whether del Toro intends the viewer to understand his film as Todorov's uncanny (the little girl's hallucinations and dreams) or his marvelous (actually magical). However, for the sake of this study, *Pan's Labyrinth* will be regarded as moving into the realm of the marvelous at its conclusion, meaning that the magical events were actually happening. But in its particular uses of out-of-the-ordinary characters and actions, the film also incorporates magic realism.

The Magic-in-Reality of Magical Realism

Most often used primarily to refer to Latin-American writers, the term *magical realism* was originally coined to characterize a movement in the 1920s where visual artists explored "new ways of seeing and depicting the familiar. . . . Subjects most often painted include the city square, the metropolis, still lifes, portraits and landscapes. . . . it was the fastidious depiction of familiar objects, the new way of seeing and rendering the everyday . . . that inspired the style" (Guenther 1995, 33–36). The visual art concept eventually invaded literature. Thus, while magical-realist painting makes the ordinary—the real—unusual and compelling, magical-realist

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writing incorporates the fantastic into the everyday. A singular aspect of magical-realist stories and novels is the way "the coexistence of magic and realism is presented in a matter-of-fact way as being natural. . . . In the fusion of these two opposite epistemological concepts, the former boundaries between the real and the supernatural fade, and the improbable becomes objectively possible" (Delicka 1997). This cohesion of the real and the fantastic is magical realism's "irreducible element." Something that cannot be explained logically, such as an extraordinary or magical happening, is reported "in the same way in which other, ordinary events are recounted. The narrator's presentation of the irreducible element on the same narrative plane as other, commonplace happenings means that in terms of the text, magical things 'really' do happen" (Faris 1995, 167).

Magical realism's fairy tale (marvelous) happenings are taken out of that genre's world, where they are a normal part of life, and incorporated as ordinary occurrences. Events may float between real and imaginary worlds, facilitating "the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction. The propensity of magical-realist texts to admit a plurality of worlds means that they often situate themselves on liminal territory between or among those worlds—in phenomenal and spiritual regions where transformation, metamorphosis, dissolution are common, where magic is a branch of naturalism, or pragmatism" (Zamora and Faris 1995, 6).

Film directors such as Jan Jakub Kolski, Andrei Tarkovsky and Alexander Sokurov have been particularly successful in adapting magical realism to the screen. Ghosts, levitation, and odd events (such as a flying paper butterfly that lands on a wall and suddenly becomes painted there in the 1983 film *Eréndira* [directed by Ruy Guerra]) prevail as natural occurrences in their films, exemplifying the recognizable paradigm for this narrative style. However, even some mainstream American films such as *Field of Dreams* (directed by Phil Alden Robinson, 1989), *Across the Universe* (directed by Julie Taymor, 2007), and *The NeverEnding Story* (directed by Wolfgang Petersen, 1984) employ magical realism in their incorporation of fantastical creatures and/or happenings into the ordinary (Taylor n.d.).

For example, *The NeverEnding Story* primarily takes place in an imaginary world within the book that a young boy named Bastian reads. However, Bastian soon discovers that the events in the story within the story are actually unfolding in the book's fantasy world, with which he becomes involved. By the film's conclusion, viewers witness the boy gaining revenge

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against a group of bullies, who threaten his daily life, with the help of his new, flying dog/dragon friend, Falkor, from the book's fantasy world. This film consistently establishes and reestablishes its real-world setting by allowing the magical to invade or cross over. Other magical-realist films, such as *Like Water for Chocolate/Como agua para chocolate* (directed by Alfonso Arau, 1992), present odd happenings—such as food incorporating the preparer's emotions—as perfectly normal. Their characters witness and then simply accept extraordinary occurrences. The key to magical realism in films appears to be that although supernatural and strange things may occur, they are nonetheless anchored in and associated with the real (and recognizable) everyday world.

What Is Reality, Anyway?

Despite the rang1e of films that play with representing the fantastic and the magical in the context of everyday life, scholars have disputed realism and its part in film virtually since cinema's beginnings. On one level, everything captured by the camera's lens is real. However, especially in this age of computer generated imagery (CGI) graphics and other forms of technology that allow images to be created and/or altered, the filmic reality may be contentious. To develop her argument, Temenuga Trifonova uses theorist Siegfried Kracauer's assertion that "the power of cinema lies in its ability to make us see what normally goes unseen" (2006, 57). Even without manipulation, objects that may be familiar and everyday can become extraordinary in the camera's eye. For example, Kracauer points out that "the close-up reveals new and unsuspected formations of matter; skin textures are reminiscent of aerial photographs, eyes turn into lakes or volcanic craters. Such images blow up our environment in a double sense: they enlarge it literally; and in doing so, they blast the prison of conventional reality, opening up expanses which we have explored at best in dreams before" (1997, 48).

He suggests that filmic special effects can be commonly understood as camera realistic under particular circumstances: "Provided the real and the fantastic are indistinguishable on the screen, the fantastic is cinematic . . . i.e., so long as the fantastic is not represented *as* fantastic but as part of ordinary reality, it is included in camera-reality" (Trifonova 2006, 61). Trifonova

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applies Kracauer's interpretation of special effects to science-fiction film.[4] She notes that "if alienation [of an everyday object on camera] is essential to the establishment of the real, then an object that is already alienated [one that is not recognizable to the viewer] is more real than an object that depends on the medium of cinema to alienate it" (Ibid., 57). Thus, the unknown and imaginary worlds of science-fiction film—aboard spaceships or strange planets in solar systems or universes that the audience knows nothing about—fundamentally render the fantastical on camera more real to the viewer than the everyday. Consequently, such fantasy may offer a more realistic cinema than, for example, a documentary; there is no alternative, knowable object within the real world against which to compare the imaginary to declare it fake. Magical creatures and marvelous places become increasingly believable as computer graphics, costumes, and makeup techniques continue to advance.

Trifonova's theory introduces new shades of meaning to the terms "magical" and "realism." Thus, if magical-realist literature incorporates and naturalizes the fantastical into the ordinary world, magical-realist film approaches other visual forms in the genre since the camera renders everything real. *Pan's Labyrinth* offers an opportunity to explore these implications. As in magical realism, the creatures in *Pan's Labyrinth* are from a different world—an indistinguishable form of camera reality—and they find themselves interacting with an otherwise real, historic world—the fascist Spain of 1944. In the film's two-layer story—one magical and one real—the two exist independently. There is no incorporation of one space into the other, nor is there a point when they completely converge as in most forms of magical realism. Although at moments the magical makes an appearance in the real world—the chalk door that leads Ofelia to Captain Vidal's (Sergi López) room or the mandrake root that makes Carmen (Ariadna Gil) well—characters other than Ofelia never confirm magic's power; others always deny and ignore it. Only Ofelia experiences the characters and magic of the underworld/otherworld. With the fantastic and the real remaining separate, the only link between them is the little girl herself, who eventually chooses one world over the other. As Jack Zipes notes, Ofelia "has *real* double vision, unique powers that enable her to see two worlds at the same

4 Fantasy and science fiction literature and films present "a world different from our own and the differences are apparent against the background of organized bodies of knowledge" (Rabkin 1976, 135). Author Orson Scott Card distinguishes them this way: "If the story is set in a universe that follows the same rules as ours, it's science fiction. If it's set in a universe that doesn't follow our rules, it's fantasy" (1990, 22).

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time, and we watch as she tries to navigate through two worlds, trying to use the characters, symbols, and signs of her imaginary world to survive in a social world destitute of dreams and filled with merciless brutality and viciousness" (2008, 236).

Magical realism is undoubtedly influenced by fairy tales.[5] Literary scholar Rawdon Wilson writes that he and his children came to the conclusion—after reading a story by magical-realist author Gabriel Garcia Marquez—that it was "not like a fairy tale nor like a myth. . . . It was not even like, my son observed, 'The Lord of the Rings.' But it had brought to mind all of those other texts they had read" (1995, 209). Wilson goes on to describe a hypothetical pair of brothers and their evolution into magical-realist authors who imagine a world where the sky rains flowers and all human existence is counterfactual. Eventually the brothers begin to tell stories about their invented worlds "with a straight face, without shrugs, secret winks, or other hints that it was, after all, just a tale" (Ibid., 212), a storytelling technique that enables the story to seem natural and real.[6]

Wendy B. Faris relates magical realist narrative style to a story told to an open-minded and curious child instead of a logic-driven adult: "Wonders are recounted largely without comment, in a matter-of-fact way, accepted—presumably—as a child would accept them, without undue questioning or reflection" (1995, 177). While Faris's ideas about age-distinguished thought processes are highly questionable, she describes the essence of magical realism: to make the fantastical appear an ordinary occurrence in the real world. Fairy tales, on the other hand, make the magical a normal part of life but rarely venture into the real world; the normal instead resides fully within the fairy tale world, which does not resemble the everyday one. Consider Jim Henson's film *Labyrinth* (1986). Although there are marked similarities between it and *Pan's Labyrinth*—including not only the labyrinth itself but also a stolen baby and a girl (Sarah [Jennifer Connelly]) who links the fairy tale and real worlds together—they nonetheless fall into different categories.

5 In fairy tales, magical and fantastical creatures, objects, and processes are a natural part of life. Seven-league boots may be better than regular ones, but they exist in the same world; humans may transform into birds and birds into humans without narrative notice that such an event is at all unusual. Yet the time and place are not the audience's own. Magical realism, as already indicated, places magic within normal, everyday situations (as fairy tales do), and its location and time are those of everyday life; the reader or viewer recognizes the magical-realist setting as the real world.

6 This style of storytelling is deliberately employed within tall tales, which propose impossible events that the audience takes as real until the narrative's conclusion.

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Labyrinth begins in the real world but moves to the fantasy world and remains there. With no parallel between the fantastical and the real, the fairy tale remains disconnected from the real world, just as life for Sarah's parents continues with them both oblivious to and completely absent from the story on-screen.

In *Pan's Labyrinth*, however, each time Ofelia completes one of her errands within the fairy tale underworld/otherworld, she is always among its creatures and in its rooms. Though the faun appears in the real world, only she can see him. No confirmation of the other world's existence comes from any other character in the film. Ofelia's mother could have found temporary remission from pain through the doctor's treatments, not the mandrake root, for example. The magical events are never explicitly incorporated into the real world so that they become natural and everyday as in magical realism. The fantastical layer of *Pan's Labyrinth* is separate and like a fairy tale, in contrast to magical realism. The realistic story told simultaneously with the fairy tale links the film with magical realism, but the film also employs and departs from structures and strategies from more conventional fairy tales.

In *Pan's Labyrinth,* only the viewer and Ofelia experience the creatures and magic of the underworld. However, as Paul J. Smith observes, "although it is tempting to describe [Ofelia's] as the guiding point of view in the film . . . there is a great deal that she does not see" (2007, 8). The story's only true voice and vision rest with the camera—in effect, with del Toro himself. Thus, the viewer experiences "no sense of discontinuity of perspective throughout *Pan's Labyrinth,* seduced by its expert plotting and pacing" (Ibid.). At times in *Pan's Labyrinth,* the fantastical bleeds (sometimes literally, as in the film's opening and closing) into the real; however, it is never an ordinary occurrence as in magical realism. Ofelia remains constantly aware that what she witnesses is unusual. She accepts the creatures and happenings of the underworld as normal in that world, but she recognizes its strangeness in comparison to the boundaries and logical limitations of the real world.

An example of the fantastical infiltrating the real world occurs when the faun gives Ofelia the mandrake root to put under her mother's bed to make her well. Initially the infant-like root remains unseen by any other eyes. Its apparent effectiveness becomes obvious when Carmen begins progressively to get better. When Ofelia displeases the faun by defying his directions and eating from the Pale Man's (Doug Jones) table, the root starts to fail and appears lifeless. Before she can revive it, Captain Vidal pulls her from under the bed. Seeing the smelly root, he angrily shows Carmen and stalks from

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the room. Carmen also looks at the root in disgust and at her daughter with disappointment. Though Ofelia tries to explain her world of fairies and magic, Carmen throws the mandrake into the fire. A horrifying cry emanating from the writhing creature matches the tremendous pain that causes Carmen to double over. Soon after, she dies in childbirth.

The most memorable incorporation of fantasy into the real world is Ofelia's use of magical chalk to escape her guarded room and enter Captain Vidal's quarters to bring her baby brother to the labyrinth. Soldiers stationed outside her door have been instructed to shoot Ofelia if she tries to leave; thus, the only means of escape is through a door she draws upon the wall with chalk. Because it is apparently seen by others in the film as simply a sign of Ofelia's overactive imagination (although the question of how she manages to escape a locked, guarded room lingers momentarily with the camera on the drawing), no one spends much time thinking about the chalk door. The audience is, of course, aware that the door has magically transported Ofelia to her stepfather's room. But the other characters are apparently too busy with their own problems to wonder about Ofelia's escape. Captain Vidal finds the chalk on the table, but he does not see Ofelia enter the labyrinth through the new door, nor does he see the faun when he reaches its center; he simply sees Ofelia talking to herself because the faun is invisible to his eyes. Only Ofelia and the viewer recognize the other world that runs adjacent to the real one.

The Fairy Tale and Its Heroines

The fairy tale adventures of the young protagonist of *Pan's Labyrinth* begin as she and her pregnant mother, Carmen, are being driven to the home of Ofelia's new stepfather, Captain Vidal. Carmen asks to pull the car over because she feels nauseous. While she tries to regain control over her stomach, Ofelia begins to walk down the road and inadvertently kicks a rock that lies in her path. Upon picking it up, Ofelia notices a mark on its surface that resembles an eye. She eventually locates a large sculpture made of stone—a lone and strange figure among the surrounding trees—and puts the missing piece back into its rightful place. This act initiates her fantastical adventure: immediately a bug resembling a praying mantis emerges from the statue's mouth. It startles Ofelia, but then she smiles, unafraid of this large insect as it seems to flap its wings in greeting.

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When Carmen calls her back to the car, Ofelia exclaims, "I saw a fairy!" Her mother ignores this statement (and is apparently oblivious to the rock statue standing alone in the woods as well) and begins to tell Ofelia about Captain Vidal. In fairy tales, the magical is often similarly "depicted as generally unobserved or undervalued by most people . . . they do not see the magic—as is the case in 'Aladdin's Lamp' where the lamp is hidden in a cave and appears rusty and old, or in 'Cinderella' where the fairy godmother appears only to the heroine" (Jones 1993, 13). Yet Aladdin's lamp nevertheless does produce objects in the fairy tale, just as everybody sees the accoutrements the fairy godmother gives Cinderella—both in their original and then transformed shapes. In contrast, neomagical realism prevents the fantastical from crossing over into the real, at least as given conscious validation by other real-world characters. Conversely, some *Pan's Labyrinth*'s fairy tale-world characters seem quite aware of what's going on in both locations and can move between them. Others, like the creepy and dangerous Pale Man, cannot cross the border.

The beings in the underworld/otherworld differ from those in most fairy tale film adaptations for children. The fairies, for example, are not beautiful creatures but instead odd and dark with leaflike wings and bald heads with large ears and eyes.[7] No cute, sparkly dust or glow emanates from the fairy's body as she leads Ofelia down to the labyrinth that first night, and no happy lights or bright colors appear to guide her. These notable differences between the fairies she sees in her books and those in the underworld do not seem to bother Ofelia in the least. She takes everything in stride, as content in this fantastical otherworld as she is out of place in the real one.

From the shadows of the labyrinth emerges a strange figure with horns and legs like a goat, long pointed fingers, ears that stick out, and skin that seems—much like that of the fairies—to be earthlike, made of tree bark or stone. He informs Ofelia that he is a faun (whom the English title names as

7 Traditionally two types of fairies populate literature and fairy lore. Nineteenth-century Victorian children's literature presents stories and images of small, beautiful, winged creatures who "flitter about as butterflies and who appear and disappear in the blink of an eye" (Cheadle 2007, 2). In other European fairy lore, fairies were more or less troublesome creatures standing about two feet tall—closer to a leprechaun's size than a butterfly's. These "little people" had a tendency to braid horses' manes to ride them at night (untangling the braids brought punishment); had a penchant for stealing children and leaving in their place a human-looking but evil changeling; and were often blamed for leading people astray with lights and music (Narváez 1991). These fairies were best avoided because the consequences of witnessing their dances or hearing their music were often dire (see Rieti 1991).

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Pan) although he, like the fairy, diverges from what audiences may picture in that role.[8] Pan (Doug Jones) explains to Ofelia that she must complete three dangerous tasks to prove her immortality and return to the underworld. Although the viewer may want to believe that Pan is a fairy tale helper sent to assist Ofelia, the "trustworthiness of the faun, who is immense and weird-looking, ancient and sphinxlike, is clearly meant to be ambiguous; he appears to be kind and gentle sometimes and mean and menacing at other times" (Zipes 2008, 238). This consistent contradiction in Ofelia's advisor keeps her and the audience guessing about his intentions until the very end of the film.

Like some other female fairy tale ingenues, Ofelia's independence and strength ill fit her in this new environment. Laura Hubner observes that "in a powerful way, Ofelia disobeys throughout the film: she refuses to call Vidal 'father,' she ventures into the woods and returns to the labyrinth. Finally she disobeys her step-father . . . and disobeys the faun by not handing over the baby and she says 'no' to Vidal after he takes the baby" (2007, 6). Traditional fairy tale princesses were frequently punished for their arrogance and pride. Such a character could be forced to suffer "a humiliating fall that reduces her from princess to peasant, from a privileged daughter to an impoverished menial" (Tatar 1987, 102–3). Ofelia is just such a heroine, temporarily demoted from her royal state. However, she is given an increasing amount of freedom due to her mother's progressing illness and her stepfather's utter contempt. While she is reproved for her failure to assimilate to Captain Vidal's world, as with other fairy tale heroines, this reprimand does not force her to abandon her strong attributes. Instead, the indifference of the adults in her life enables her to escape and pursue her adventures virtually unnoticed.

The sequence of events in Ofelia's journey makes her resemble many fairy tale males who consistently receive help and aid despite the fact that they often disregard advice given by the powerful.[9] The three fairies that the faun provides for Ofelia when she journeys to the lair of the Pale Man can easily be associated with fairy tale helpers: creatures or people who guide the fairy tale hero and support his actions. Like Ofelia, the hero continues

8 In fact, Paul J. Smith notes that "del Toro's grotesque wooden creature could hardly be further from another recent film faun, the friendly, furry Mr. Tumnus of *The Chronicles of Narnia*" [directed by Andrew Adamson, 2005] (2007).

9 A similar transgendering, but in the opposite direction, is the subject of Ming-Hsun Lin's chapter on Harry Potter as Cinderella.

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to receive help and advice in spite of any missteps. Once he "exhibits the virtue of compassion—with its logical concomitant of humility—he can do virtually no wrong, even when he violates interdictions, disregards warnings, and ignores instructions" (Ibid., 97–98). Hubner notes that Ofelia's ease at imperturbably gazing at the creatures of the underworld in their somewhat disturbing states also aligns her with the heroes of fairy tales: "Ofelia confronts head-on her visions of the faun tearing off raw flesh with his teeth . . . the corpse monster whose eyeballs rest on the table . . . the portraits of babies being devoured by monsters on the walls. . . . Her encounter with these decadent, gothic and grotesque images of ageing and decay suggests an awareness of a dark, tangible, mortal side of humans befitting a hero on a quest rather than a passive ethereal princess" (2007, 5).[10]

The paramount example of Ofelia's affinity with the male fairy tale protagonist is her encounter with the Pale Man. Ofelia fails to heed the warnings of those who advise her in the fantasy world, receiving various admonitions before and even as she undertakes this task and getting into near-fatal trouble. The faun tells Ofelia that she must not eat or drink anything from the elaborate feast, emphasizing that her life depends on it. Her magical book similarly advises her. As she enters the Pale Man's cavernous lair, she first sees the delicious banquet spread out on the table and, in her awe at the food, is startled when her eyes discover the grotesque, silent figure seated at its head. A pair of eyeballs sits on a plate before the Pale Man. He does not gaze at the tempting meal before him but—just like the ogre in "Hop O' My Thumb" (ATU 327B) or the witch in "Hansel and Gretel" (ATU 327A)—has other morsels in mind. The murals that adorn the cavern walls depict the Pale Man eating children. Ofelia stares at these paintings in horror and then turns to see a large pile of children's shoes in the corner. All these attempts at cautioning Ofelia, however, fail to give her the strength to resist the temptation of tasting the grapes. Even as she takes the fruit, the fairies try to stop her, and she brushes them away. Ofelia's decision to partake results in the loss of two of her fairy guides and subjects her to Pan's wrath.

10 Ofelia resembles the tomboy/transgendered hero/ines in the complex Newfoundland tale "Peg Bearskin" (ATU 327B/328/711) and its relatives "Tatterhood" (ATU 711), "Muncimeg" (ATU 327B/328), and "Kate Crackernuts" (ATU 306/711) (see Greenhill, Anderson-Grégoire, and Best 2010).

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The Fairy Tale: Stereotypes and Traditional Tropes

Fairy tale wicked stepparents, like the stepmothers in the stories of "Snow White" (ATU 709) and "Cinderella," are familiar. The traditional fairy tale was often rife with "figures of female evil" (wicked stepmothers, ugly sisters, and witches), yet *Pan's Labyrinth* instead employs a male villain, less common for the genre (Warner 1994, 201–17). As the biological mother who dies, *Pan's Labyrinth*'s Carmen exemplifies a typical female role long established in fairy tales. Generally sympathetic, if somewhat deluded considering Captain Vidal's unsavory attributes, Carmen desires to please her new husband. As independent and strong characters, Captain Vidal's housekeeper, Mercedes (Maribel Verdú), who, unbeknownst to him, is a spy for the Republican guerrillas, and Ofelia have much more in common than do the little girl and her mother. As they lie in bed on their first night in Captain Vidal's home, Ofelia asks her mother why she remarried, and Carmen replies that she was tired of being alone. Like many female characters in both the most popular Grimm fairy tales and Disney features, Carmen yearns for her prince to come and complete her life. Her submissive attitude toward her husband resembles that of many other female characters in the Grimm tales.[11] Life could not have been easy for a single mother in Spain in 1944, but the result of Carmen's marriage—her death and Ofelia's (at least in the real world)—emphasizes the falseness as well as the potentially damaging effects of such a mindset.

In opposition to some traditional fairy tales, as well as many Hollywood films, *Pan's Labyrinth* is free of romance.[12] Carmen finds herself in a relationship where she is essentially a decorative object, exemplified in the dinner scene where Captain Vidal condescendingly remarks that she believes that the story of the way they met is interesting to others, enjoining her to be silent. Where other fairy tales describe a heterosexual couple who come

11 Ruth Bottigheimer shows that Wilhelm Grimm often removed direct speech from the good, virtuous female characters and gave it to men or evil female characters. Her examination of the dialogue in "Cinderella" concludes that "it is not an overt curse that condemns her to silence; it is the pattern of discourse in *Grimms' Tales* that discriminates against 'good' girls and produces functionally silent heroines" (1987, 53).

12 As noted in Cristina Bacchilega and John Rieder's chapter, romance remains a significant part of most fairy tale films, even those that attempt to parody Disney's versions of the genre. Romance is similarly absent in Nietzchka Keene's *The Juniper Tree* (1990), where sexual relationships are primarily economic, as discussed in Pauline Greenhill and Anne Brydon's chapter.

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together after enduring character-testing hardships, *Pan's Labyrinth* breaks with this pattern to create strong heroines who complete their journeys for themselves and achieve their own advancement. In a more conventional narrative, perhaps the relationship between Mercedes and the good doctor (Álex Angulo) or one of the other Republicans might have developed into romance, but not in the chaotic and dangerous world of *Pan's Labyrinth.*

The film also rejects the long-established happily-ever-after fairy tale ending. Such a conclusion "affirms the moral propriety of the universe. . . . Not only do Snow White, Cinderella . . . and the young hero . . . win their respective mates and hearts' desires [castles and kingdom], their evil adversaries are consistently punished" (Jones 1993, 17). At the film's conclusion, Mercedes fails to save Ofelia from Captain Vidal (such an ending would, of course, have prevented the happy conclusion in the fairy tale world) but succeeds in punishing him (fatally) and rescuing Ofelia's brother. Perhaps in caring for him, Mercedes will obtain her heart's desire because she longs for children. Even so, the film confirms that the Nationalists will simply send another "Captain Vidal" to take his place at the mill, and so the cycle of oppression will continue. While the young Ofelia escapes Captain Vidal's world and returns to the underworld to reclaim her throne, she does so only through death. This dénouement begs the question of whether Ofelia actually achieves her heart's desire—though her reunion with her parents in the otherworld is clearly a happy one.

The Historical

The first indication that *Pan's Labyrinth* is destined to be a story with roots in a grim and dark reality is its introductory sequence. After briefly traveling along a shadowy expanse of cement, the camera stops at Ofelia's face as she lies gasping for life while blood runs from her nose to the ground below. This momentary glimpse of a young girl in a time of suffering is enough to alert the viewer that this film may not have an unequivocally happy ending. The audience then has a brief introduction to the fantasy world as the camera reveals an outline of a young girl running up a circular flight of stairs enclosed in darkness, escaping the underworld and attempting to reach the sunlight of the human world above. The scene changes and the camera begins to follow a car as it drives down a road that leads past ruined, broken buildings, surrounded by forest. It is a beautiful, sunny day, a situation not often seen later in *Pan's Labyrinth*. Ofelia and Carmen are riding in the car,

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but they will never again be as happy together as they are during this initial sequence. As they become increasingly immersed in life with Captain Vidal, the close relationship between mother and daughter gradually diminishes. (The captain's deleterious impact on everyone involved with him, including himself, is represented by increasing down-pouring rain as the characters approach their generally tragic fates.)

Captain Vidal is no stereotypical fairy tale villain, although he is a typical and easily recognized evil figure. As a member of the Nationalist party—a Fascist political group led by Francisco Franco that received assistance from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy during the Spanish Civil War—he is an icon of what Hannah Arendt called "the banality of evil" (2006), with no qualms about shooting the innocent and torturing prisoners for the advancement of his political party.[13] He shoots innocent hunters and tortures prisoners but also listens to martial music while he shaves. A symbol of the horror of the Nationalists and their ideology, Vidal is eventually defeated by the Republicans hiding in the surrounding woods, who persistently launch guerilla attacks on his military post at the mill. After Franco's Nationalists won the war in 1939, opposing opinions became nonexistent in Spain. Although the Republicans in Spain did not succeed—arguably until the death of Nationalist dictator Generalissimo Franco in 1975 and the transition to democratic government—del Toro clearly admires their renowned determination to continue fighting for their beliefs and their unwillingness to surrender. Hence, Captain Vidal is at once unredeemable, as in fairy tales, and a character from a historical narrative.

His character is immoral, sadistic, and as a result extremely easy to dislike. Although taking another's life is apparently inconsequential to Captain Vidal, living up to the expectations that he and others have for him as the son of General Vidal progressively weighs upon him as *Pan's Labyrinth* unfolds. The captain is a sociopath, del Toro explains, who "hates himself. He essentially cuts his own throat in the mirror. He's so afraid of his father's legacy that he denies even having the watch his father gave him. But his function, like most fascists in 1944, is that of an absolutely destructive force" (quoted

13 In her analysis of Otto Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1961, Arendt concludes that his willing participation as an S.S. officer during the Holocaust did not result from evil or hatred toward Jews. She argues that Eichmann simply and mindlessly followed instructions to please his superiors. His desire to move up in rank and become a man of importance superseded any personal moral code he may have held. As a result, Eichmann completed tasks efficiently and with no consideration about the consequences for his victims.

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in Faye 2009). The larger-than-life father image that the captain contends with—and the fear that he has not reached a position nor made achievements significant enough in comparison—take their toll on Vidal. As the film progresses, time becomes a preoccupation for the captain, and his fear of wasting it increases. The ticking of his watch haunts him. It counts down the seconds as he comes closer to his ultimate and undignified end.

The consequences of underestimating women become clear when Mercedes defeats Captain Vidal. The embodiment of sexism, he "barely acknowledges the existence of the feminine. Welcoming his pregnant wife and stepdaughter to the mill he addresses them in the masculine plural form [*bienvenidos*] on the assumption that the unborn child, his true priority, is a boy" (Paul Smith 2007). He regards women as expendable—he quickly chooses the life of his unborn son over that of his wife—as well as incompetent. Remarkably, he never suspects Mercedes of spying until the evidence literally stares him in the face. Even once he knows she is a Republican and imprisons her in the supply room, he makes the cardinal mistake of turning his back on her. (In a deliberately parallel previous scene, where he tortures a captured male Republican, Vidal consistently turns to smile sadistically at his captive as he describes his plans). The captain unequivocally believes in the strength and superiority of men over women, yet his destruction comes about as a result of the three females—Carmen, Ofelia, and Mercedes—whom he naïvely allows to enter his life.

Neomagical Realism

Siegfried Kracauer asserts that cinema has the ability to make the everyday appear extraordinary. Objects that one encounters on a daily basis can become compelling and exotic when recorded by the camera lens. He and other theorists such as Jean Epstein and Fernand Léger "put forward the argument that the power of cinema lies in its ability to make us see what normally goes unseen" (Trifonova 2006, 57). Alternatively, Duncan Petrie suggests that the "interest in fantasy is related to the belief that fantasy helps to explain the fascination, and so the power, of cinema" (1993, 2). For these theorists, cinema is truly powerful when depicting the imaginary on-screen. Indeed, many Euro-North American audiences seem more attracted to fantasy, science-fiction, and comic-book films than to documentaries or other films with a more serious agenda. An article in *Entertainment Weekly* commented on the ability of "popcorn films" to draw viewers: "This summer's

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blockbusters (*Iron Man* and *The Dark Knight* for example) have been a mother lode for fans of subtext. And popcorn movies are great vehicles for the transmission of ideas because, unlike overtly political films such as *Rendition* and *Redacted*, people actually go see them" (Nashawaty 2008, 23).

Fantasy films sell tickets not only because they are often visually impressive but also because they superficially appear to offer escapist entertainment. Such works can convey opinions or beliefs in an extremely subtle and nonthreatening way. Much like fairy tales—which were written "for adults who needed to lay bare the real in order to entertain the hope that change might be possible . . . the goal of fairy tales is not a conservative but a Utopian one . . . as if to say 'One day we might be happy, even if it won't last'" (Petrie 1993, 26)—films of fantasy attempt to encourage reform (or like *Pan's Labyrinth,* even revolution) under the guise of visual spectacle.

Conflicts between scholars and filmmakers about whether cinema is a representation of reality or an art form have resulted in "two opposing tendencies: one towards the recording or documenting of external 'reality', the other towards the imaginative use of cinematic illusion" (Ibid., 2). It seems appropriate, then, that this divergence is often placed side by side in a single film, perhaps reaching a culmination in neomagical realism. Although the historicized story of *Pan's Labyrinth* cannot be described as an exact representation or direct recording of reality—the film is by no means a documentary—it is nonetheless based within a specific, historical time period. Yet despite these realist roots, *Pan's Labyrinth* probably attracts its audience through its parallel story of fairy tale fantasy.

As mentioned earlier, Trifonova proposes that a world unlike our own with which the audience is unfamiliar, such as the underworld of *Pan's Labyrinth*, can be perceived as more realistic than recognizable scenery and objects on screen that have a correlative in the real world. The cinema's ability to capture the fantastic, even when filming the everyday, allows it the power to command and thus influence its audience. It is distinct as an art form in this respect.[14] While a superbly performed and filmed realistic story can hold the viewer's attention, a film with fantastical visual effects may find a larger audience. If the aforementioned popcorn films can persuade and affect the viewer, and if—as some film theorists argue—the power of cinema

14 Television can also be said to have this influence; however, the medium's smaller screen size limits its impact. Television must rely on its actors and stories more than its visuals to affect the viewer (although the implementation of HDTV may change this situation).

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lies in its ability to make the everyday fantastic, *Pan's Labyrinth* accesses both sides of the film-as-art, film-as-reality option and thus manifests some of the most persuasive and engaging attributes of film expression. With its paralleling of real and fantastical worlds using neomagical realism, *Pan's Labyrinth* represents a powerful and innovative new genre.

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